United Nations UNW/2012/5

Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Distr.: General
24 April 2012

Original: English

Annual session of 2012
29 May-1 June 2012
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
Report on the regional architecture review

Regional architecture

Summary

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/289 on system-wide coherence, with a mandate to assist Member States and the United Nations system to progress more effectively and efficiently towards the goal of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The UN-Women strategic plan, 2011-2013, stressed the need to adapt the organizational structure of UN-Women to support efficient and effective implementation of the mandate. To this end, key elements of a new regional architecture for UN-Women have been identified to better support Member States and to leverage the United Nations system. Those elements are informed by consultations with Member States, civil society partners, United Nations agencies and UN-Women staff. UN-Women also commissioned an external study of options for its regional architecture, including lessons from other organizations both within and outside the United Nations.

Drawing from the external analysis and the different options proposed, and considering the specific needs of the organization, including the increased focus on building capacity, providing support to UN-Women in the field and decentralizing decision-making, UN-Women developed a new regional architecture that maximizes the organization's ability to deliver on its mandate.

* UNW/2012/L.3.

12-31382 (E) 140512

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The present report, prepared pursuant to paragraph 8 of Executive Board decision 2011/5 on the UN-Women biennial institutional budget for 2012-2013 (see UNW/2011/13), outlines the new regional architecture and explains how it addresses the organizational needs of UN-Women to best support Member States. It highlights important next steps for implementing the new regional architecture, including ongoing work to develop a comprehensive change management and implementation plan.

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/289 on system-wide coherence, with a mandate to assist countries and the United Nations system to progress more effectively and efficiently towards the goal of achieving gender equality, women's empowerment and upholding women's rights. In the present document, prepared pursuant to paragraph 8 of Executive Board decision 2011/5 on the UN-Women biennial institutional budget, 2012-2013 (see UNW/2011/13) UN-Women presents its plans for a new regional architecture. This is in line with the strategic plan, 2011-2013 (UNW/2011/9), and the Executive Board's overall backing for the priority attached by UN-Women to strengthening and improving support to countries by increasing the capacity of its offices at the regional and country levels. The detailed budgetary implications associated with the new architecture are being finalized and will be presented at the second annual session of the Executive Board, in September 2012.

2. UN-Women is working towards a world in which societies are free of gender-based discrimination, where women and men have equal opportunities, where the comprehensive economic and social development of women and girls is ensured and where women's rights are upheld in all efforts made to further development, human rights, peace and security.

3. The present report provides the rationale and framework of a new regional architecture that will enable UN-Women to respond effectively to national and regional priorities, as requested by Member States and the United Nations system. It also lays out the next steps to be taken in implementing the new regional architecture.

II. Context

A. Opportunities of a new regional architecture

4. The mandate of UN-Women, which is worldwide, spans normative, advocacy, programming and coordination roles. This requires UN-Women to work with and through the entire United Nations system, Governments, intergovernmental entities and non-governmental and civil society partners, in the areas of development, human rights, peace and security.

5. UN-Women is mandated to catalyse and achieve impact with greater efficiency, leveraging existing resources and relationships in the United Nations system rather than duplicating existing agencies' structures and processes in delivering on its mandate.

6. This complex mandate represents an opportunity for UN-Women, as the newest entity in the United Nations system, to respond effectively in a changing international development cooperation environment. Improved effectiveness will come from its ability to be more efficient in its structures and processes and agile in its use of different modalities, including coordinating different forums in various geographic areas and working with a diverse range of partners.

7. In recent years the development cooperation landscape has been changing. There is an increased focus on development effectiveness and results rather than just on aid effectiveness. Official development assistance has been affected by worldwide financial stress. South-South collaboration is increasing, with a variety of actors and institutions from civil society and the private sector contributing to development cooperation. The ability of UN-Women to work flexibly in this new environment is a critical requirement for success.

8. In this context, the United Nations has prioritized national ownership, enhanced coherence and increased efficiency and development effectiveness in the support it provides to Member States. As an integral part of the United Nations system, UN-Women envisions itself to be a strategically focused, globally relevant organization that advocates on behalf of and contributes to the achievement of results for women and girls by effectively leveraging the United Nations system and other resources nationally and regionally.

9. In order to achieve this vision, UN-Women seeks to improve its organizational structure to become a dynamic, decentralized, cohesive and connected United Nations entity. This requires addressing the overly centralized organizational structure, devolving programmatic and financial decision-making to the field, with greater clarity regarding accountability and reporting lines, and simplification in business processes. It is in this context that the strategic plan, 2011-2013, stressed the need to adapt the organizational structure of UN-Women to support efficient and effective implementation of the mandate.

B. Current organizational structure and its challenges

10. UN-Women has recently laid the foundations for a strong organization for the future. Two budgets and the strategic plan, 2011-2013, were developed and approved by the Executive Board. Staffing was completed at headquarters, including the establishment of a new senior management team. Key bottlenecks and challenges, particularly in the areas of operations and management, were identified, and an action plan was developed that, once implemented, will result in a more efficient, effective, transparent and accountable organization offering value to its stakeholders.

11. UN-Women is pursuing two main priorities in organizational effectiveness: first, strengthening work in the field by progressively expanding its reach and deepening its engagement at the country level; and second, enhancing the efficiency and results of its programmes.

12. UN-Women assessed its capacity at headquarters and at the country level prior to defining its requirements. The current organizational structure of UN-Women headquarters is the result of a functional analysis conducted and finalized in 2010 that led to the consolidation and integration of functions of the four entities that became UN-Women. This first key milestone in the establishment of UN-Women did not address the alignment, complementarities and synergies of functions and structures between headquarters and the subregional and field offices.

13. The field capacity assessment completed in early 2011 helped to define minimum core capacities required at the country level for a UN-Women country office. The institutional budget provided funding for a minimum of five staff in

17 priority country offices, which is the minimum capacity for the establishment of a country office. The 2012-2013 institutional budget expanded the outreach to build capacity for an additional 21 countries.

14. UN-Women recognizes that it faces several legacy issues. Intensive consultations with a variety of partners and staff over the past year have confirmed the most urgent of these that must be addressed on a priority basis: uneven capabilities across the organization; overly centralized decision-making and approval authority; bottlenecks that delay the delivery of services by field offices; misaligned reporting lines that prevent appropriate oversight; and inconsistent internal communication and knowledge-sharing.

15. Recent recommendations from external and internal audits of UN-Women country and subregional offices point to areas that could be further strengthened, including staffing structures and capacity to ensure proper project planning and monitoring, internal control and allocation of accountability and management arrangements.

16. At a series of regional meetings held in September and October 2011 with staff from country and regional offices and headquarters, the following items, required to address priority challenges, were identified:

(a) Decision-making authority and status of UN-Women representatives at the country level commensurate with their programming, inter-agency and representational functions;

(b) Sufficient and predictable financial resources to facilitate strategic programmes;

(c) Secure contracts for staff;

(d) Appropriate technical and operational capacity at the country level;

(e) Region-specific policy expertise, located close to country offices to foster high-quality programming;

(f) Simpler and more standardized business processes, which are currently cumbersome and time-consuming;

(g) Better communications and knowledge-sharing at all levels.

17. The UN-Women leadership retreat, held in January 2012 for all UN-Women representatives and senior leaders from the field and headquarters, also identified similar priorities. One of the key findings from the survey conducted in the context of the regional architecture analysis in February 2012 was that staff looked to the implementation of the regional architecture to address some of those structural challenges.

C. Ongoing efforts to improve effectiveness

18. The new regional architecture needs to be considered within the overall context of the institutional development of UN-Women. Country offices are being strengthened on the basis of recommendations of the field capacity assessment conducted in 2011 and the Board-approved institutional budget. This strengthening includes adequate staff capacity and delegation of authority based on internal

control and oversight frameworks and more predictable staff contracts. Offices strengthened following Executive Board approval of the 2011 support budget and the 2012-2013 institutional budget have also been fast-tracked for increased delegation of authority.

19. As a result of concerted efforts, progress has been made in identifying and selecting leaders for UN-Women representative positions in more than 25 countries, ensuring UN-Women representation at a level similar to that of other United Nations agencies. Leadership training for senior staff at headquarters and at the field level is planned for the second half of 2012 to promote a highly motivated, innovative leadership that leads by example, is accountable and driven by results and champions change to improve the lives of women and girls.

20. UN-Women has prioritized putting in place more robust frameworks to enable a strategic and nimble response to national priorities in line with the UN-Women strategic plan, 2011-2013. By the end of 2011, 56 country-level strategic notes and annual workplans had been developed for UN-Women country and regional offices covering programme contributions to national priorities through a coordinated country team response. The strategic notes and workplans were peer-reviewed to ensure quality. They provide a new basis for reporting and results-tracking at the country level.

21. Programme and operational policies and procedures, most of which were inherited from the United Nations Development Fund for Women, are being revised to ensure that they better meet the current needs of the UN-Women country offices. Key areas being reviewed include reporting, simplification of programme approvals and greater delegation of authority from both a financial and programmatic perspective. The alignment of operational modalities with United Nations harmonized and simplified procedures is also prioritized.

22. Along with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other funds and programmes, UN-Women successfully rolled out new accounting standards, in compliance with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards, on 1 January 2012. The roll-out provided an opportunity to update and improve key operational procedures and to train UN-Women staff at the country level. UN-Women will continue to monitor and support the implementation of the new accounting standards, ensuring the constant improvement of processes in the field and at headquarters, accompanied by the provision of full technical support and training to offices as needed.

III. Regional architecture analysis process

23. Following a competitive selection process, UN-Women contracted Dalberg Global Development Advisors to conduct a regional architecture analysis that would provide a set of options to the senior leadership of UN-Women for consideration. The analysis explored options for improving the configuration of the organization across the country, regional and global levels. The goal was threefold:

(a) To identify and assess potential improvements in organization, operations and oversight, informed by internal consultations as well as by external benchmarks;

(b) To outline implementation considerations and strategic trade-offs associated with architecture options;

(c) To summarize recommendations for further consideration by UN-Women.

24. The regional architecture analysis built upon important initiatives over the past year, including but not limited to: (a) the strategic plan, 2011-2013; (b) the field capacity assessment — minimum requirements for a UN-Women presence at the country level; (c) the action plan to follow up on the five regional meetings held in late 2011; (d) the biennial institutional support budget for 2012-2013; and (e) the strategic framework for the period 2012-2013 on gender issues and advancement of women (A/66/82), as modified by the Committee for Programme and Coordination in A/66/16. It is also aligned with the ongoing effort to improve organizational effectiveness.

25. The analysis spanned a period of 14 weeks, from January to March 2012, and included consultations with Member States, United Nations agencies, regional commissions, civil society representatives and UN-Women staff in the field and at Headquarters. Approximately 330 interviews were conducted, including with United Nations agencies and other partners. In addition, the mandate, functions, capabilities, resources and organizing structures of UN-Women were discussed through an all-staff survey in three languages, select field visits and videoconferences with 18 field offices. The regional architecture analysis also looked at the regional architectures of other organizations, both from within the United Nations system and outside, to understand what structures exist, how they evolved and under what conditions and to what extent they have worked.

26. Throughout the process, a reference group provided guidance and feedback, testing hypotheses and survey results and commenting on proposed models. The composition of the group reflected a mix of UN-Women staff from across locations, levels and functional areas, including two staff representatives elected by their peers.

27. In a report submitted to the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director and her senior management in March 2012, three options for a new regional architecture were proposed for potential innovations in the regional structure, operations, support and oversight. The options are summarized in the annex.

IV. New regional architecture

28. Drawing from the analysis and different options proposed, UN-Women considered the advantages and disadvantages of various options against the specific needs of the organization and developed the new regional architecture that maximizes the organization's ability to deliver on its mandate.

29. Continuing its efforts to strengthen its response to the needs of women and girls, the new regional architecture shifts decision-making and policy, programmatic and operational support to five regional centres and a select set of multi-country offices, best equipping UN-Women to achieve its vision and address structural challenges in the organization. UN-Women country offices will continue to be strengthened and report directly to regional centres. Locating and empowering senior leaders in the field facilitates strategic decision-making that is responsive to national and regional priorities and effective cooperation with the rest of the United Nations

system to carry out normative, policy, advocacy and coordination responsibilities. Focusing resources in 5 regional offices versus the current 15 subregional offices allows the leveraging of existing UN-Women and United Nations system resources, utilizing economies of scale to provide deeper, broader support and guidance to country offices. Increased delegation of authority to the regional centres and country offices from headquarters, supported by appropriate operational capacities and systems, simplifies processes and reduces reporting levels.

30. Five guiding principles were identified to develop a new regional architecture that best allows UN-Women to: (a) decentralize authority to the field with the required operational support functions; (b) get the maximum impact from existing resources and synergies with other organizations; (c) best serve the coordination function of UN-Women in the United Nations system; (d) ensure quality and accountability across all levels of the organization; and (e) ensure coherence for the role, messaging and mandate of UN-Women.

31. Each of these five design principles implies the empowerment of countries by devolving responsibility to the field as well as operational support to make processes more efficient. Based on those principles and the inputs from the consultative process, UN-Women developed the current planned changes to the regional architecture.

A. Overview and rationale

32. The current organizational structure of UN-Women consists of: a headquarters office with 6 divisions, 15 subregional offices, 2 regional centres, a presence in 50 country offices with a designated country representative or country programme manager and a programme presence in 24 countries. The 15 subregional offices are overseen and supported by headquarters. In turn, the subregional offices oversee and support country-level work.

33. The new regional architecture changes this structure by focusing oversight and support to country offices in five regional centres where high-level policy, normative and operational expertise will empower country offices to achieve greater country-level influence and impact. The increased presence of policy and normative experience in the field also enables UN-Women to better leverage the programmes, networks and resources of United Nations agencies and partners and to move closer to its vision of being catalytic across the United Nations system.

34. The new regional architecture also addresses current challenges. It addresses inefficiencies in structure and processes because it simplifies and speeds up oversight and decision-making in support of country offices. It focuses headquarters staff on corporate strategic direction-setting and messaging, overall corporate oversight and support and delivery on the mandate at the global level. It enables the delineation of clear business processes that will shorten the time taken to request and receive support and to report results. Peer reviews and joint decision-making, where appropriate, will be utilized, including incentives to increase collaboration both internally and across the United Nations system and joint work across geographic areas to break down silos and hierarchies and foster a culture of productive dialogue. This is also expected to lead to more effective learning and increased knowledge-sharing.

35. Cost was an important factor in developing the new regional architecture. Consultations with organizations that have undergone changes in field architecture

suggested that the two ma[illegible] drivers of cost are the establishment of new offices and the recurrent cost of running them. To mitigate those costs, the regional architecture builds on existing UN-Women offices and locations and maximizes existing staff capacity within the organization. It also proposes the fewest number of offices at the regional level compared with other options that were considered. By focusing and consolidating staff and resources in five regional centres and ensuring increased coverage though a small number of multi-country offices, this architecture enables economies of scale and maximum leveraging of resources.

36. Analysis of the budget requirements of the new regional architecture is ongoing; once the implementation details of the new regional architecture are finalized, the exact costs will be determined. Several factors are being considered, including costs related to determining the required staff capacity in the regional centres and one-time operational costs associated with changing the current field infrastructure. The result of this analysis will be a detailed costing of the implementation of the new regional architecture. Pursuant to paragraph 13 of Executive Board decision 2011/5 on the biennial institutional budget for 2012-2013 (see UNW/2011/13), this analysis will be contained in the report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director on the use of change management resources to be submitted to the Executive Board at its second annual session, in September 2012.

B. Regional centres

37. The locations of the five regional centres are determined on the basis of the current presence of UN-Women, in alignment with existing United Nations hubs. The centres are Panama City, Cairo, Bangkok and Nairobi, plus a location for the Europe and Central Asia region still to be determined. Those locations allow for the leveraging of the existing offices of UN-Women and are aligned with the regional hubs of other United Nations agencies, especially the offices of the key partners of UN-Women, namely, UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF, and, where possible, regional commissions.

38. The role of regional centres is threefold: (a) to empower and support country-level capacity and processes to deliver on the UN-Women mandate; (b) to oversee country- and region-based mandate delivery across normative, policy, advocacy and United Nations coordination roles; and (c) to deliver on the UN-Women mandate at the regional level by leveraging regional coordination mechanisms and liaising closely with other regional bodies, such as the African Union and the League of Arab States.

39. UN-Women regional centres will simplify and clarify reporting lines for country offices, thereby reducing transaction costs. Country offices will be supported by headquarters as appropriate and will receive support from the regional centre in the following areas: policy expertise, inter-agency coordination, programme design, monitoring and evaluation, resource mobilization (for non-core resources), communications and operations.

40. Regional directors will contribute to strategic planning with heads of bureaux and divisions through frequent communication between headquarters and the region, contributing insight and guidance from the field. They will report to the Director of the Programme Support Division and work closely with other divisions at headquarters, and contribute regularly to senior management team discussions. Regional centres oversee country strategy implementation, monitor strategic progress

and recommend course corrections where necessary, reporting to headquarters on a regular basis.

41. UN-Women will continue to strengthen the support it provides to Member States through its existing offices around the world. Increased coverage to support additional countries will also be ensured through multi-country offices where UN-Women does not have a presence. In specific geographical contexts, where distance makes it difficult for regional centres to fully serve a particular set of countries or in subregions that share similar characteristics such as language, services will be provided by multi-country offices. For example, small island States may not require an in-country presence but may require geographically close support and oversight that will be difficult for regional centres to provide.

42. Multi-country offices function exactly as country offices do, except that their programme plans incorporate initiatives supporting Member States and country teams in more than one country. Multi-country offices report to regional centres in the same way as country offices do.

43. Thus the 15 offices currently referred to as "subregional" in the strategic plan will become either regional centres, country offices or multi-country offices.

C. Optimizing internal collaboration

44. UN-Women will strengthen internal communication and collaboration to enable staff to deliver on its mandate as a unified whole and ensure cohesion within the new decentralized structure. Some initiatives to foster and institutionalize internal communications and improve the overall effectiveness of UN-Women are discussed below.

45. Virtual "communities of practice" will be increased to facilitate knowledge-sharing and more effective learning within and across regions. The exchange of knowledge and experience on thematic results as well as collaborative development of thematic knowledge products will enable UN-Women to leverage capacity globally for increased performance and to achieve results. The use of videoconferencing facilities will be increased for regular meetings between headquarters and regional directors and field staff.

46. The strategic planning process will include peer participation and review. For example, while each of the five regional centres would maintain full responsibility for their region, other regional directors would be invited to participate in the presentation by regional centres of country plans to headquarters.

V. Implementing the new regional architecture

47. The change process for the new regional architecture will need to move UN-Women from its current organizational challenges to its envisioned end state of a decentralized, dynamic and interconnected organization.

48. An implementation plan is being prepared for the new regional architecture, taking into account the functions of regional centres, reporting lines, business processes and authority levels. UN-Women has sought advice from United Nations agencies, notably UNFPA, which recently implemented its regionalization strategy,

and external organizations undergoing change. This advice highlighted the importance of a comprehensive communications strategy.

49. Consultations among leaders and managers of UN-Women started in April 2012 to finalize key design attributes, including the functions of and relationships among the regional centres, multi-country offices and country offices, the criteria for the establishment of multi-country offices, principles for providing support on policy, intergovernmental processes and United Nations coordination to countries and the required capacity for programme support at headquarters for regional centres and country offices. A change management plan is being developed to guide UN-Women through these decisions and their implementation.

50. An analysis of the financial implications of implementing the new regional architecture model will be included in the report of the Under-Secretary-General/ Executive Director to the Executive Board at its second regular session of 2012 on the use of change management funds pursuant to paragraph 13 of Executive Board decision 2011/5 on the biennial institutional budget for 2012-2013.

Annex

Summary of three models from the regional architecture analysis

1. A regional focus model shifts the locus of decision-making and technical support to five large regional centres, one in each major region. Regional centres empower country offices and multi-country offices in two ways: one, by overseeing and guiding the development and implementation of country plans (spanning normative, policy, advocacy, programmatic and United Nations coordination roles); and two, by providing accessible, region-specific support across those roles. The model assumes greater delegation of authority to country offices and regional centres, with larger transactions requiring sign-off from the Bureau for Policy and Programme at headquarters. Regional centres coordinate across United Nations Development Group teams and regional commissions and liaise with regional bodies to further the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda. The benefit of this model lies in its ability to provide consolidated support to country offices from the field while maximizing economies of scale. A risk is the development of five autonomous "sub-organizations" that hinder cohesion in mandate delivery.

2. An expanded regions model locates decision-making and country support in 13 to 15 regional centres and institutionalizes shared oversight processes. Regional centres empower country offices and multi-country offices in two ways: one, by overseeing and guiding the development and implementation of country plans (spanning normative, policy, advocacy, programmatic and United Nations coordination roles); and two, by making available localized, easily accessible technical support through budgets and rosters of external experts and dedicated internal staff. A joint oversight committee, with representation from headquarters and each regional centre, takes on country and regional strategy oversight and resource mobilization. The model assumes a slightly more limited delegation of authority of all transactions in country offices and regional centres, with larger transactions requiring sign-off from the joint oversight committee. Regional centres coordinate across the regional commissions and teams and liaise with regional bodies to further the gender equality and women's empowerment agenda. The benefit of this model is that it greatly leverages the existing field architecture. The large number of region-based offices, however (13-15 regional centres versus 5 in the regional focus model), necessitates either a significant increase in resources or limited authority and depth of support to country offices.

3. A country cluster model devolves decision-making to the field by eliminating the regional layer entirely and consolidating the field presence into 25 to 35 multi-country offices that report directly to headquarters. This model empowers country offices in two ways: one, it devolves decision-making and resources directly to the countries; and two, it eliminates a layer of oversight and enables internal communication and coherence by directly connecting countries to headquarters. Each of these multi-country offices develops and delivers country programmes in two or three countries. The multi-country offices are organized into "clusters" of three to nine offices in each major region or continent. A joint oversight committee, consisting of the Programme Support Division and an elected multi-country head in each cluster (the Cluster Director), oversee country and regional strategies, enforcing organizational coherence. The model has the most limited delegation of

authority for all transactions in multi-country offices. The benefit of this model is that it devolves decision-making to country offices, providing the closest possible support to Member States and United Nations country teams. However, to provide the full capacity required to deliver on the UN-Women mandate at the regional and country levels, this model requires the greatest investment in resources across the 25 to 35 offices.